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The Philosophers in Sunni Prophetology

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- 1 In Sunni Islamic theology, the prophetic institution is the object of a separate treatise, called *Nubuwwat* which is here translated as *prophetology*. This treatise tackles a set of classic issues, as the definition of prophetism, the possibility or the necessity of its existence, the demonstrations of its existence, the manner by which it operates, etc.
- 2 Whether in its rationalist (*kalam*) or literalist (*al-aqida*) expressions, this theology has taken shape in reaction to the doctrines and systems of preexisting and competing thoughts, which are either internal or external to Islam. The theologians of Islam are in fact driven by the necessity of setting the limits on the Islamic community by identifying the heresies, these disqualifying doctrines, which are adopted by groups or more rarely, by individuals who cannot be taken into account among the partisans of the truth (*ahl al-haqq*). Yet, if the prime objective of their treatises is to establish a doxography, namely to present the opinions that shape the Islamic creed the criticism of religions or heretical doctrines is so decisive that they have also been designated as heresiologies¹.
- 3 Thus, if we wish to understand the origins of a doctrine that is taught in this theology, it is necessary to research its defensive or polemic aspect. This is a research conducted within the framework of our doctoral thesis on Sunni prophetology. In this current article, which follows this research, we expound the discourse of five most influential Sunni theologians about the Islamic philosophers' thoughts on the prophetic institution. These thoughts have been quite controversial among theologians and have strongly determined the history of philosophy in the Islamic world.

***Barahima*, Free Thinkers and *Falasifa*: a Typology of Denial of the Prophetic Fact**

- 4 The denial of Mohammad's prophetic mission has nourished an entire literature, whose treatises bear titles that vary on the different ideas of "proofs of prophetism" (*Dala'il al-*

Nubuwwa). It is difficult to obtain a precise plan of these treatises, since they vary according to the school of thought of the different authors who have tackled this issue. In general, the treatises include two parts: the first relates to the justification of the prophets' existence and responds to all deniers of the prophetic fact; the second part, which is often more developed, is devoted to justify the mission of Mohammad and addresses the followers of biblical religions, for whom the existence of prophets is already established.

The *Barahima*

- 5 The specialists disagree on the origin of this group². S. Stroumsa, who discusses free thought in medieval Islam in a major work, regards them as a myth that has been created by the Muslim heresy in order to symbolize the prophecy's denial³. Two possible hypotheses may relate to them: the first one is that their existence is a mere invention and the second is that the group in fact existed while their doctrine is a later elaboration that sets them up as the archetype of the prophecy's denial. Be that as it may, they are systematically summoned up by the theologians as soon as the latter want to illustrate the rationalist objections to God's actual sending of legislative prophets. The *Barahima* are most often described as deists who reject any prophetic mediation between God and His creatures and who voluntarily observe the rites if they are permissible by their ethics. And the rational arguments that are attributed to them converge on the idea of sovereignty of the human reason as the intermediary between God and human beings.

The Free Thinkers

- 6 We are going to borrow the expression "free thinkers" from Sarah Stroumsa who dedicated a piece of work to define this category and to defend its reality. This concept is quite convenient as it enables us to describe the authors of the different eras and of the different perspectives, who all have in common their disproof of the prophetic fact, even if the expression itself is not popular with the experts.
- 7 S. Stroumsa maintains that free thought is a phenomenon that is typically Muslim, a heresy of which the specific nature is developed in answer to the centrality of prophecy in this religion. According to this author, there is no atheism in Islam. There are only viewpoints that tend toward it and free thought is the particular form of non-belief, generated by this religion.
- 8 It is important to note that her thesis rests mainly on the book of heresiography *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (*The Book of Sects and Creeds*) by the Ash'ari theologian Al-Shahrastani (d. 1153) who establishes a correlation between the denial of prophetism and personal opinion or reason. This treatise is divided into two parts. The first discloses the doctrines of the revealed religions: on the one hand, Islam and its 73 sects and on the other hand, Judaism, Christianity, Mazdasim and Dualism. The second part focuses on the bearers of the arbitrary doctrines (*Ahl al-Ahwa' wa-l-Nihal*) and includes the Indian religions, the Sabians, the anti-Islamic Arabs and philosophers. The common denominator of these groups is that they all follow traditions that are not based on a revelation. Shahrastani characterizes them as *Ahl al-Istibdad bi-al-ra'y*, implying "those with an exclusive personal opinion." D. Gimaret and G. Monnot, who translated Shahrastani's work, interpreted this term as "free thought", thus paving the way for S. Stroumsa⁴.

- ⁹ According to Shahrastani, the first one to have adopted this attitude is *Iblis*⁵ who preferred to follow his own opinion rather than to obey the divine commandment. Our heresiologist would thus qualify him as the prototype of the free thinker⁶. His definition of free thinkers encompasses all the deniers of prophecies, who like other philosophers, Sabians and *Barahima*, do not accept the proclaimed laws (*Shara'i*) but establish rules that are based on reason (*Hudud 'Aqliyya*), so that observing these rules enables them to live in society⁷.
- ¹⁰ In Islamic thought, the two figures who seem to have left their mark with regard to the denial of prophetism are Ibn al-Rawandi (d. between 864 and 912) and the philosopher Abu Zakariyya al-Razi, Rhazes in Latin (d. 925 or 932)⁸.
- ¹¹ Regarding Ibn al-Rawandi, only few of his works have survived and the information in the Muslim sources are contradictory. Thus, there are many unknown sides to his intellectual biography. Many studies have tried to clarify the mystery by remaining however hypothetical, thus also resulting in contradictory views⁹. As S. Stroumsa points out, most of the sources agree however on the fact that Ibn al-Rawandi devoted a work, the *Kitab al-Zummrud*, to the refutation of prophetism¹⁰.
- ¹² With regard to Abu Zakkariya al-Razi, his contempt for the prophetic institution is told in a work that summarizes the public debate that he had with his namesake, the Ismaili theologian Abu Hatim al-Razi a Rayy (d. 934)¹¹. The latter implies that Abu Zakariyya's arguments are extracted from one of his works, probably the *Kitab Makhariq al-Anbiya'* (*The Book of Subterfuges of the Prophets*), of which only a few fragments have survived¹².

The *Falasifa*

- ¹³ In Islamic thought the word *Falasifa* (sing. *Faylasuf*) is derived from the Greek and specifies the *ancient* ones, meaning the Greek philosophers, as well as their heirs in the Islamic world, such as al-Kindi (d. 873), al-Farabi (d. 950), Avicenna (d. 1037) and Averroes (d. 1198)¹³.
- ¹⁴ We have already mentioned two categories connected with the denial of prophetism: the free thinkers and the *Barahima*, which S. Stroumsa's typology (which draws its inspiration from the *Book of Sects and Creeds* by Shahrastani) links to the *Dahriya* (materialistic or eternal philosophers)¹⁴. When she tries to establish the existence of some sort of heresy, which is specific to Islam and which does not derive from atheism but from the rejection of prophetism, S. Stroumsa points out that the *Falasifa* were spared of the accusation of being deniers of prophetism and thereby, of free thinking. In order to support her point of view, she states that by including the prophetic fact to the philosophical system through the assimilation of the *Philosopher King* by Plato to the prophet of Islam, the philosopher Farabi avoided classifying the *Falasifa* among the deniers of prophetism¹⁵.
- ¹⁵ However, it might seem that S. Stroumsa underestimated the criticism of which the *Falasifa* were subjected to by Sunni prophetology. And as we will see in a certain number of decisive texts, these philosophers will be accused not only of maltreating the prophetic institution by not respecting the Prophet's authority as the supreme guide toward the salvation in the two worlds, but also of concealing their non-belief in the exclusive nature of the divine revelation as the path to happiness.
- ¹⁶ Before tackling these texts, let us specify that we distinguish between two kinds of works that are able to formulate critical analyses against the prophetology of the *Falasifa*. The

objective of the first ones is to refute the philosophy, as the *Tahafut al-Falasifa* by Ghazali or the *Kitab al-Musara'a* by Shahrastani¹⁶, to which we associate the works of heresiology that consider the philosophers as a political-religious category. The second kind of works aims to establish a prophetic fact and thus, expresses criticism in order to defend this institution against the ideas perceived as heretic and *a fortiori* against the deniers, as can be seen in the case of the treatises by *Kalam* or by *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*.

Al-Mawardi (d. 1058)

- 17 Mawardi, the great theologian and Shafi'i jurist who died in Baghdad in 1058, distinguished himself in the field of political theory, of which he is considered to be the founder within Islam. Under the reigns of the Abbasid Khalifs *al-Qadir* (r. 363/974-381/991) and *al-Qa'im* (r. 381/991-442/1031), he held the position of supreme judge (*qadi al-qudat*) and proved to have great political commitment toward the authorities. Besides his voluminous treatise of *Fiqh* untitled *Al-Hawi*, Mawardi's remaining works focus mainly on ethics and politics. His rationalist viewpoints on theology resulted in him being blamed and suspected of secretly belonging to the Mu'tazila movement.
- 18 The only treatise of theology, for which he is known, is called *A'lam al-Nubuwwah* (*Signs of Prophecy*) and falls within the same named kind of treatise.
- 19 In accordance with the method used by speculative theologians, the work begins with a reflection on the channels of knowledge whose object is the classification of different claims cited in the presentation¹⁷. When the author reaches the chapter dedicated to the presentation of the prophets' existence, he offers a listing of diverse categories of deniers of prophetism. The first category addresses the *Dahriyya* (men who believe in eternity) who glorify the world's eternity and "deny the existence of God and thus, the one of His prophets"¹⁸. The second category is that of the *Barahima*. The third one includes the philosophers who are described as follows:

The third kind [of deniers] are the *Falasifa* who don't show openly that they nullify [the existence] of prophetism while nullifying it, depending on what the examination of their written works reveals. Because they say that the *Divinalia* (*al-'ulum al-rabbaniya*) [are obtained] after the development of disciplinary sciences (*al-'ulum al-Riyadiyah*), such as philosophy and geometry. They [the *Divinalia*] are established by the one whose discipline has achieved perfection if he is open to it¹⁹.
- 20 According to Mawardi, these philosophers thus claim to be able to gain access to the kind of knowledge that the religious faith attributes only to the prophets. Even if their harming of the prophetic institution is perceptible only through hermeneutics, the *Falasifa* are portrayed as deniers. However, it is really their *art of writing* that differentiates them from other deniers. Accusing them of concealing their true beliefs and of making public their conformity with the religious dogma is commonplace in the criticism of philosophy.

Al-Shahrastani (d. 1153)

- 21 Sharhastani, a Persian theologian and historian of religions, who was born in 1086-7 in Khorasan and died in 1153, is a major personage in the Ash'ari school. His biographers tell of his preference for the philosophic contemplation whereas his known works are rather

rebuttals of philosophy. Because of certain aspects of his thoughts, his contemporaries accused him of secretly adhering to the Ismaili Shi'ism²⁰.

- 22 The book that we are going to use is precisely the one that S. Stroumsa used as a starting point in her thesis on free thought in Islam. It is a treatise of heresiology that has marked history both by the scale of the provided work as well as by its remarkable neutrality that characterizes it.
- 23 Before looking at Shahrastani, let us look at the study that Jean Jolivet devoted to the "philosophers of Shahrastani"²¹. This study demonstrates the heresiographer's desire to establish a historical and doctrinal reconciliation between the prophets and a category that is discussed in the second part of the book, namely "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom", in particular Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato. Apart from the fact that this list does not correspond to the seven wise men of the Greek tradition, each of Shahrastani's wise men is likened to a Koranic prophet. One can read for example that "Pythagoras was a contemporary of Solomon and drew his wisdom from 'prophecy'". Thus, through emulation, the prophecy's doctrine circulated toward Socrates and Plato, attenuating gradually toward Aristotle who is excluded from it and whom the heresiographer includes in a subsection that is completely different from the one of the seven sages²².
- 24 According to Jolivet, Shahrastani's intention was to outline a comparison between the two historic groups of philosophers and prophets. And regarding the treatment of the subgroups of the philosophers of Islam, in which we can find only Avicenna, Jolivet writes:

From a religious point of view, we could say that this Muslim [Avicenna] renounces his Book in order to follow a pagan [Aristotle] who was already a long way from the quasi prophetic wisdom of the first Greek sages: it is therefore with good reason that he is placed immediately before the Arabs of the Jahiliyya and the Brahmans who have only a vague or even inexistent understanding of the prophecy [...] To evoke the pillars of wisdom in the *Musara'a* and the *Nihaya* in order to use them as a counterpoint to "certain philosophers of Islam", in particular, Ibn Sina, is to call for the support of contemporaries and disciples of the ancient prophets against the modern ones who prefer the teaching of Aristotle to the one of the Koran²³.

- 25 Let us now look at what Shahrastani writes in the second part of his *Book of Sects and Creeds* about metaphysical philosophers (*Ilahiyyun*), mentioned after the Eternists (*Dahriyyun*):

Others have a certain culture. They rise above the sensible and recognize the existence of the intelligibility. Yet, they tolerate neither punishment nor orders, neither [proclaimed] law nor conformity. They think that by obtaining clarity and affirmation, the world had a beginning and must return [to God] and that they reached perfection: their happiness would thus be measured according to their understanding and their skills, their misfortune would be measured according to their foolishness and ignorance. These are the metaphysical philosophers.

The laws and their authors are useful, so they say, for ordinary people. Punishment and orders, what is lawful and what is prohibited, are positive matters [of law]. The authors of the Laws possess practical wisdom and sometimes, they formulate orders, establish what is lawful or prohibited, for the benefit of men and for the prosperity of countries. Yet, what [the prophets] tell us about any reality of the world of spiritual beings (like the angels, the sovereign Seat, the Throne, the Guarded Tablet, the *Kalamoi*) is for these philosophers only an intelligible reality that was expressed in an imaginary corporal manner, just as [the prophets] tell about the circumstances of the Return [to God], meaning to the [heavenly] Garden

and the [infernal] fire. Palaces, irrigation canals, birds and fruits in the Garden are nothing else but a stimulation of the ordinary people to wish for what their nature yearns; chains and yokes; disgrace and exemplary punishment in the Fire are nothing else but a stimulation of the ordinary people to wish for what their nature dreads. It is the only explanation: because one cannot conceive either shapes or body forms in the Upper World.

This is exactly the place where [the philosophers] think best of the prophets (may peace be upon them!). I don't mean those who drew their knowledge from the Niche of the Prophecy but only those [the philosophers] of Antiquity; Dahriyyah... [wa-al-hashishiyya]²⁴, physicists, metaphysicists. Their judgment mislead them, they isolated themselves in their arbitrary doctrines and their blameworthy innovations

²⁵.

- 26 Obviously, Shahrastani talks about the philosophers who live in an Islamic context since the religious categories, denied by the latter who consider them as poetic discourse, are quite connected to this religion. Here, prophetism is not totally invalidated but it would be suitable only for the multitude. It should be noted that certain philosophers seem to escape from the verdict by finding grace in the eyes of the author²⁶.

Al-Ghazali (d. 1111)

- 27 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who was an Ash'ari theologian and Shafi'i jurist, is an eminent figure in Islamic thought. Even though he was strongly influenced by the writings of Avicenna, he is considered to be a fierce opponent of philosophy and his name cannot be overlooked in the study of the status of philosophy in Islam.
- 28 Born in 1059 in Tus, Iran, he, whom posterity called "The Proof of Islam" (*Hujjat al-Islam*), provided the first systematic refutation of the *Falsafa* through his famous *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, despite the fact that his rationalism and his inclination for Avicenna's philosophy caused him to be criticized for being involved in philosophy. Many researchers have tried to clarify the complexity of his thought, in which grey areas still remain.
- 29 In *al-Munqidh min al-dalal*, the autobiography that recounts his intellectual journey, Ghazali talks about his first steps toward the study of philosophy and explains that his interest for this school was prompted by his wish to bring to light its deleterious character. His assumption is that one should first be aware of the mysteries of a discipline before criticizing it. It is thus said that he studied the peripatetic philosophy without the help of a teacher during his free time²⁷.
- 30 It is thus in reply to the *Falasifa* that he composed the *Tahafut al-falasifa*, which discredits twenty of their doctrines, of which three impose the anathema according to his judgment: the denial of the resurrection of the body, the denial of God's knowledge of individuals, the eternity of the world. The other seventeen issues are condemnable innovations²⁸.
- 31 According to Ghazali, the *Divinalia* is the field in which the philosophers made most mistakes. He accuses them of wanting to obscure their heretic views by enriching their discourses with religious categories. Thus, according to him, by means of combining their discourses with those of the prophets and mystical thinkers, the philosophers induced disasters, which impact the devotees of philosophy and its opponents alike.

- 32 At the end of the work, when he explains why he decided to return to teaching after a ten-year long break, Ghazali discloses the importance of the belief in prophetism within the epistemology of Islam:

I have noted a cooling of belief that is linked to the prophecy, to its reality and to the practice it ordains. I have noticed how much this is widespread among human beings. I have thought about the causes of this half-heartedness and weakening of faith. There are four of them: the philosophers, the mystics, the Batiniyya and the illustrious scholars²⁹.

(...) The fifth [*i.e.*, the philosopher] tells me:

I don't act by simple conformism. However, I studied philosophy and perceived the prophecy's reality. Yet, it comes down to wisdom and benefit [of the multitude]. The religious practices that it recommends have as their sole object to discipline the common men and women, to prevent them from killing one another, from fighting and from giving in to their wishes and desires. I am rather a wise man who trusts wisdom that turns me into a clear sighted [man] who is free from conformism!

That is the height of faith for those who have studied the philosophy of the divines and have studied the books of Avicenna and d'al-Farabi. For them, Islam is only an outward adorning!

We might find among them a few who read the Koran, attend communions and prayers and exalt the revealed Law. However, they continue to drink wine and to commit other kinds of sins and debauchery. If we asked them: "What good is there in praying since prophecy is false?", they would certainly answer: "It's good gymnastics, a local custom and it is useful for the protection of lives and properties"³⁰.

- 33 Moreover, in a study about the argumentation implemented by Ghazali against the *Falasifa* in his famous *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, F. Griffel draws our attention to another work by Ghazali that is dedicated to the refutation of the Ismailis, the *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya wa-Fada'il al-Mustazhiriyya*, better known as *al-Mustazhiri* and which, according to the Islamic scholar, is closely related to the criticism of the philosophers.³¹
- 34 Indeed, in that book, Ghazali attacks Avicenna's prophetology. It is true that he doesn't condemn all of its aspects but he particularly criticizes its sociopolitical impact³², especially the idea that the prophet addresses the multitude (*'Awamm*) with a picturesque speech. A multitude that is incapable of hearing the truth about invisible things so that the revelation will promote only itself. Even if the philosophers would not benefit from what the revelation teaches, because they would discover it themselves by demonstration (*al-Burhan*).
- 35 According to Ghazali, although its authors justify this theory by a search for the common good (*Maslaha*), it conceals in reality a non adherence to what God passed on through the voice of his prophet. He thus condemns this vision of revelation because it underlies that it would be beneficial but that it does not correspond to the absolute truth.
- 36 And since the truth is the first assertion of the revelation, this view of things implies accusing the bearer of this revelation of deceit. The accusation of deceit or not telling the truth (*Takdhib*) is opposed to the assent, meaning, the belief in the truthfulness of the prophets and the sincere characteristic of their revelation. After a long deliberation, Ghazali rules on the impiety (*Kufr*) of the bearers of this political view of prophecy.³³

Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201)

- 37 Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi is a theologian, historian and traditionalist of Hanbali obedience. He was born between 1112 and 1114 in Bagdad. Raised into a very rich family, he became one of the most verbose authors of Islam. His work, which has been widely published in the Muslim world, is very fashionable in the contemporary *Salafi* circles today. In his great and highly polemic work of heresiology, *Talbis Iblis (The Devil's Deceptions)*³⁴, Ibn al-Jawzi devotes a few lines to criticism of the philosophers. Generally, he accuses them of being mistaken by following only their personal opinions and intellect and not conforming to the prophets' statements³⁵. After enumerating the principal faults they are found with, namely their denial of bodily resurrection, of the materiality of paradise, of hell and of divine attributes (will, knowledge, etc.), Ibn al-Jawzi addresses the philosophers of Islam as follows:

Satan has thus deceived³⁶ groups among the people of our religion through their intelligence and penetration (*Dhaka'ihim wa Fitnatihim*), by indicating that the truth (*al-Sawab*) consists of following the philosophers on the grounds that they are sages who have produced discourses and acts that demonstrate perfect intelligence and penetration, as [is witnessed] with the spread of wisdom by Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle and Gallienus. They had a wealth of knowledge in geometry, logics and *Naturalia*. They discovered elements of metaphysics (*Umur Khiffiyya*) through their penetration but when they talked about the *Divinalia*, they amalgamated them (*Khallatu*) – which explains that they did differ on this [field], yet they did not differ on the sensitive geometric [knowledge] (*al-Hissiyyat wa-al-Handasiyyat*) [...].

They were mistaken because the human powers understand this knowledge [the *Divinalia*] only in a summarized manner and yet, the source [of this knowledge] is religion. Furthermore, their disciples were told that these Ancients negated the existence of the Creator and rejected the religions by regarding them as laws and ruses (*Nawamis wa-Hhiyal*). They [the *Falasifa*] stuck to what they had been told and refused the religious banner (*Shi'ar*) in that they neglected to pray and indulged in interdictions [...]. The Jews and the Christians can be pardoned more than them since they observe religions that are established by miracles; and the innovators (*al-Mubtadi'a fi al-Din*) can be pardoned more than them since they preach reflection on arguments (*al-Nazar fi al-Adilla*). Whereas they (the *Falasifa*) may have had other reasons for being impious (*Kufrihim*) than just knowing that the [ancient] philosophers were sages and mind you, they ignored the fact that the prophets were sages and much more.

[...] We have seen philosophers (*Mutafalsifa*) of our community whose philosophism (*al-Tafalsuf*) generated only perplexity, [and consequently,] they conformed neither to philosophism nor to Islam. Some of them fasted [on the month] of Ramadan and prayed and then, began to deny the Creator and prophetism (*al-i'Tirad 'ala al-Khaliq wa-l-Nuburwwat*)³⁷.

- 38 The *Falasifa* are thus accused of sinning by substituting the prophets' authority with the authority of the ancient philosophers. As Ghazali also states, this leads them to shirk ritual practices by viewing the revelation as a mere legal code, or even worse, as a ruse. Some of the philosophers aren't consistent and do observe the religious rites but disprove of prophetism. Finally, according to Ibn al-Jawzi, apart from their impiety, the philosophers of Islam have a servile attitude.

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328)

- 39 Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah was born in 1263 in the city of Harran, one of the strongholds of Hellenistic philosophy, into a well-known family of Hanbali jurists. His biographers are unanimous in praising his intellectual qualities, in particular his unusual renowned ability to memorize facts.
- 40 This outstanding theologian, jurist and polemicist is considered to be the supreme authority of contemporary *Salafites*. His bibliography is impressive, it contains a large amount of works dedicated to the traditional religious genres (jurisprudence, theology, exegesis) and polemic works, of which most are devoted to the refutation of theology, of speculative Sufism and of philosophy.
- 41 Ibn Taymiyyah, who had an extensive knowledge of Avicennian philosophy and of speculative theology, devoted an important part of his work to criticizing the Greek logic, the metaphysics of the *Falasifa* and their *Divinalia* in particular.
- 42 The *Falasifa*, whom he regards as godless, are one of his favorite targets. For example, quoting Al-Kindi, whom he describes to be an Islamic philosopher (*Faylasuf al-Islam*), he hastens to rectify: “*The point I want to make – the philosopher that can be found in Islam – because the philosophers are not part of the Muslims*”³⁸.
- 43 Ibn Taymiyyah says that the philosophers have an intellectual superiority complex, which he especially condemns when they confront the prophets. According to him, some of them openly give preeminence to the philosophers over the prophets when it comes to theoretical knowledge³⁹. They thus dare to invalidate the Divine revelation as a source of knowledge.
- 44 However, Ibn Taymiyyah distinguishes between the philosophers for whom the prophets disclosed facts that are contrary to the truth in order to preserve the social peace, and those who considered the prophets to be ignorant “*who didn’t know [that they taught untruths] because their perfection lies in practical abilities (al-Quwwa al-’Amaliyya) and not in theoretical abilities (al-Nazariyya)*”⁴⁰. According to our author, the first ones teach that it is in the interest (*Maslaha*) of the crowd that we address it as if this were the way things are even if it is a lie, in which case the lie would benefit the crowd because there would be no other means to guide it toward the path to salvation but the one to educate it by way of symbols.
- Avicenna and his fellow men developed their rule [of the interpretation of the revelation] on the basis of this principle, as can be seen in the law that he formulated in his *Risala al-Adhawiyya*⁴¹. These people say that the prophets used these words with the intent [of seizing] the apparent meaning (*Zawahiruha*) so that the crowd would be able to understand this meaning, even if these appearances in themselves are false and contrary to the truth. Their aim was to tell the crowds lies and vane things for the crowds’ benefit⁴².
- 45 Ibn Taymiyyah discredits the philosophers not only because they view the temporal role of the prophets as mere political governance but also because the philosophers introduce prophecy in their emanationist view of the world, and because of the consequences of their theory according to which God doesn’t know individuals:

According to them, God will not recognize Moses as a person, neither will he recognize Jesus or Muhammad nor anyone else from this world; not to mention His ignorance of details on what took place on the day [of the battles] of *Badr*, *Uhud* or

Ahzab in all the events, which He described in the Koran. They [the *Falasifa*] decreed that the prophecy is one [thing that] can be attained; it would be an emanation that pours onto the soul of the prophet when it is ready; those who prepare their souls will be able to receive this emanation. [...] this insult toward the prophets is worse than the speeches of the godless falsifiers among the Jews and Christians [...]”⁴³.

- 46 By virtue of their theory, he continues, some of these philosophers go so far as to say that the purpose of the prayer is not to worship God since, according to their principles, God doesn’t recognize the individuals and would not be able to distinguish an observant person from a non-observant person⁴⁴. Sometimes, they will maintain that the ritual practices (*al-’ibadat*) serve to polish the soul in order to prepare it for knowledge; or, they might teach that the purpose of the practices is “to find happiness at one’s home and in one’s town [and] this is what they call practical wisdom (*al-Hikma al-’amaliyya*)”. The philosophers don’t impose religious practices to those who have reached the truth of knowledge (*Haqiqatu al-’ilm*)⁴⁵, as they maintain. Some of them may add that “the prophets also weren’t obliged to engage in these practices but they fulfilled them because this validated their revelations to the communities by guiding them and not because it was an obligation for them.”⁴⁶. In response to this last accusation, Ibn Taymiyyah feels that if a person is permitted to skip prayers in certain situations provided by the law in accordance with the unanimous agreement from the community’s scholars, preaching that the philosophers themselves are exempt from them is unacceptable. As they are seen as apostates, he decides that these people are liable to the death penalty if they stop praying⁴⁷.

Conclusion

- 47 The foregoing shows quite clearly that the philosophers of Islam are considered to be deniers of prophetism. They don’t symbolize the outright rejection of this institution, following the examples of the *Barahima* or even the Eternists (*Dahriyya*), but as soon as the heresiologist or the sworn enemy of philosophy addresses their prophetologies more comprehensively than just a simple scholastic paper, the philosophers are accused in the same manner as the other deniers⁴⁸.
- 48 Based on the texts that we have discussed, we are able to identify quite a lot of criticism toward them, which relates to prophetism:
- 49 First, they are accused of substituting the authority of the ancient philosophers for that of the prophets. They are not accused of being atheists but, like the *Barahima* who prefer rationalism over the prophetic revelation, they are also guilty of a crime of lese-prophecy.
- 50 Second, the *Falasifa* are suspected of competing with the prophets within the city, in the fields of government and knowledge. They see intellectual wisdom as the path to happiness, therefore, they believe that religion is valuable only to the uneducated masses who cannot find their way to salvation through any other path. In the same vein, they are accused of evading religious practices on the ground that their salvation does not depend on them. Thus, the philosophers see in religion only its legal aspect, which excludes any difference between the divine law and the natural law. In conclusion, the theologians perceive the philosophers, including those of Islam, the *Falasifa*, as a competing group in the political arena.
- 51 Finally, by trying to hide their non-adherence to the prophetology of Islam and consequently, to the Islamic religion; by concealing their philosophical opinions behind

religious references, the *Falasifa* are regarded as impostors in the eyes of the Islamic society.

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NOTES

1. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, Louis Gardet characterized this theology as defensive apology; an expression whose use is today part of the professional vocabulary of experts on this subject.
2. P. Kraus asserts that everything we know about them comes from *Kitab al-Zummrud* by Ibn al-Rawandi, which is the first source where they are mentioned for their denial of prophesy. According to him, Ibn al-Rawandi invented them in order to show his own doctrines. Certain specialists have even alluded to a copying error, meaning that *Barahima* should in fact have been *Ibrahimiyya*, referring to descendants of Abraham who were nothing else but a Sabian sect, cf. Stroumsa, S., *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam, Ibn al-Rawandi, Abu Bakr al-Razi and their Impact on Islamic Thought*, Leyde, Brill, 1999, p. 145-6.
3. "It could be interpreted as another proof for the late, fictitious nature of the *Barahima*", Stroumsa, *op. cit.*, p. 24, n. 25.
4. See the introduction to the French translation of D. Gimaret, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, p. 13. S. Stroumsa admits that the borrowing of the expression "free thought" to the context in which it developed, namely, the intellectual history of modern Europe, is problematic. Yet, Stroumsa justifies her choice by claiming that the phenomenon of deism in the European school of thought offers a parallel that is related to the free thinkers of Islam, cf. Stroumsa, *op. cit.*, p. 7-8.
5. Koranic name that refers to Satan.
6. Cf. Shahrastani, *The Book of Sects and Creeds*, transl. Gimaret, D., Monnot, G., t. 1, p. 115.
7. *Id.*, t. 1 p. 160-1.
8. These two individuals, who have not attended the school, earned the epithets of "free thinkers" or "freethinking individuals" respectively in the works of D. Urvoy and S. Stroumsa for their original viewpoint with regard to official Islam. Cf. Urvoy, D., *Les penseurs libres dans l'Islam classique*, p. 117-132, and Stroumsa, S., *op. cit.* p. 45.
9. *Ibid.*
10. We should also refer to the *Kitab al-Intisar* by Mu'tazilah al-Khayat (d. 913) in order to learn that "the book that is known as the *Kitab al-Zummrud*, where he [Ibn al-Rawandi] stated the miracles of the prophets, may peace be upon them, just as the miracles of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, may God bless them. He refuted the reality of these miracles and maintained that these were only subterfuges (*makhariq*) and that people who had performed them were magicians and liars". Cf. Al-Khayat, Abu l-Husayn, *Kitab al-Intisar*, ed. and transl. A. Nader, Beirut, 1957, p. 12.
11. Cf. *A'lam al-Nubuwwa*, ed. S. Sawy, Teheran, 1977.
12. Parts that show the main arguments of the critical analysis of Abu Zakariya's prophetism by Abu Hatim are translated by F. Brion in the *Bulletin of Medieval Philosophy*, n 28, 1986, p. 135-62 and in the *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, n 86, 1989, p. 139-164.
13. We should take into consideration that most of the time, the philosophy's opponents borrow the form *Mutafalsifa*, meaning "philosophizers", which we sometimes translate as "alleged philosophers" or "pseudo-philosophers", which is better suited for the critical context, where they are usually mentioned.
14. That the polemist traditionally single out as the "divines" (*al-Ilahiyyun*). Jolivet translates *Dahriyyun* as "physicians", cf. *The Book of Sects...* t. II, p. 92.
15. "It thus seems that, from the time of Farabi on, the prophetology of the *Falasifa* immunized them to the suspicion of freethinking. Once the *Falasifa*, at the forefront of rationalism, had integrated prophecy into their thought, the accusation of freethinking would become

increasingly similar to that of atheism: the philosophers' doctrine was said to be like denying prophecy, or it amounted to denying prophecy. The *Falasifa* did not profess real, open and blatant freethinking, and they were not accused of professing it". Stroumsa, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

16. Which is a refutation of Avicenna's metaphysics. (Ed., transl. and notes by Madelung, W. and Mayer, W., London, 2001).

17. Mawardi's work includes rational arguments that are not founded on the sources of authority and thus, the work distinguishes itself from treatises by traditional theologians whose demonstration of the prophets' existence is based only on the Koran and on prophetic traditions.

18. Cf. al-Mawardi, *A'lam al-nubuwwa*, p. 66.

19. *Id.*, p. 66-7. Mawardi was probably referring to an opinion expressed by al-Farabi (d. 950), the founder of the political philosophy on Islamic land. An opinion according to which gaining theoretic knowledge, to which the *Divinalia* belong, can be realized only through revelation. Cf. Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr, *al-Fusul al-Madani*, ed., intro. and English transl. by D. M. Dunlop, Cambridge, 1961, p. 167.

20. A hypothesis that is strongly supported by contemporary studies. Cf. Monnot, Art "Shahrastani" *Et*, Vol. IX, p. 214-216. Brill, Leiden. 1997.

21. Cf. Jolivet, J., "The Philosophers of Shahrastani" in the *Book of Sects and Creeds*, transl. intro. and notes by J. Jolivet, and G. Monnot, t. II, p. 14-51.

22. *Id.*, p. 17.

23. *Id.*, p. 46.

24. Featuring thus in certain sources, the work poses a problem to the translators, cf. Shahrastani, *The Book of Sects* ..., t. II, transl. Jolivet et Monnot, note 15, p. 93.

25. *Id.*, pp. 92-93. As we have seen, S. Stroumsa follows Gimaret by translating *al-Istibdad bi al-ra'y* in Shahrastani by "free thought". However, according to heresiography, the philosophers of Islam are truly included in this category. Even more so, let us emphasize the symbolic impact of Avicenna's treatment in the same way as the pagan Arabs.

26. We cannot say exactly about which philosophers the author thinks, given that in this work, all renowned *Falasifa* are considered in the category of the followers of free thought, which is outside of the Muslim community.

27. Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, transl. F. Jabre, Beirut, 1969, p. 18.

28. *Id.*, pp. 23-24.

29. *Id.*, p. 47.

30. *Id.*, pp. 47-48. Translation by F. Jabre, modified by us.

31. Cf. Griffel, F., "Taqlid of the Philosophers. Al-Ghazali's initial accusation in the Tahafut" *Insights into Arabic Literature and Islam. Ideas, Concepts, Modes of Portrayal*, ed. Sebastian Günther, Brill, Leyde, 2005, p. 118.

32. Cf. al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya wa-Fada'il al-Mustazhiriyya*, ed. Badawi, A., Cairo, 1964, p. 146-168.

33. *Id.*, p. 153.

34. Ibn al-Jawzi, Abu al-Faraj, *Taliis Iblis*, Kairo, al-Tawfiqiyya.

35. *Talbis*, p. 60.

36. According to the phrase that introduces every group, opinion or critical act in the work.

37. *Id.*, p. 64-65.

38. "A'ni al-Faylasuf al-Ladhi fi al-Islam wa-illa fa-Laysa al-Falasifa min al-Muslimin", cf. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab al-radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin (The Refutation of the Greek Logicians)*, Bombay, 1949, p. 199.

39. *Id.*, p. 183.

40. *Id.* p. 140; and Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar' ta'arud al-'aql wa-l-naql*, Vol. 1, ed. M. R. Salim, Riad, 1979, pp. 8-11.

41. Cf. Michot, Y., "A Mamluk theologian's commentary on Avicenna's *Risala Adhawiyya*. Being a translation of a part of the *Dar' al-ta'arud* of Ibn Taymiyyah, with introduction, annotation and appendices" *Journal of Islamic Studies*, (2003) 14 (ii) pp. 149-203 and 14 (iii) pp. 309-363.
42. Cf., Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar'*, Vol. 1, pp. 8-9.
43. Cf. Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd*, p. 277.
44. *Id.*, p. 461.
45. Cf. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar'*, Vol 2, p. 269
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Id.*, p. 270.
48. The scholastic papers often content themselves with quoting from the *Barahima* in order to illustrate the rejection of prophetism.
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ABSTRACTS

The present article relates to the philosophers of Islam in Sunni prophetology. The prophetic set-up in theology meets the rationalist objections of the various deniers of this institution, which is fundamental to the Islamic religion. The deniers include the philosophers who attempted to find a sense in this institution with regard to the political philosophy and to the theory of knowledge acquired from their Greek predecessors. In this study, we will demonstrate that this attempt at reconciliation between religion and philosophy has in all likelihood not convinced the theologians.

INDEX

Keywords: Prophetology, philosophy, Islam, theology, rationalism, epistemology, Sunnism, Ash'arism, heresiology